

*To the Chairman and Members of the Northampton
Rural District Council.*

JANUARY, 1905.

GENTLEMEN,

I beg to present my Report for the year 1904, with the usual tables. I have assumed that the population of the District is stationary. Several new cottages and one large house have been built at Duston, but this increase is only about sufficient to make up for the deficiency shown by the last Census Returns, and one large house at Duston is still unoccupied. Some building land is being prepared at Weston Favell, and shortly we may expect building in that neighbourhood.

The total number of births during the year was 144—12 less than in 1903, and still less than the average for the last ten years, 159. This gives a birth rate of 22·6 per 1,000 on the total population of the district, or a birth rate of 27 per 1,000 if the population of Berry Wood Asylum is deducted. Of these births, 75 were males and 69 females.

The number of deaths in children under one year of age was only 13, giving a ratio per 1,000 births registered of only 90; this is much less than during any of the previous ten years, the average for which shows 20 deaths, with a ratio of 128 per 1,000 births registered.

The total number of deaths for the whole district was 169, giving a ratio per 1,000 of 26·5. Of these deaths, however, 90 occurred in Berry Wood Asylum, so that, by deducting these, we get 79 deaths of persons resident in the district, with a ratio of 14·7 deaths per 1,000. This is a trifle higher than the average for the last ten years, which is 79 with a ratio of 14·2 per 1,000, and considerably higher than in the two previous years, when the death rate was exceedingly low, viz., 12 and 12·5 per 1,000. There was no marked increase of deaths in any one district, in each one the deaths were a trifle over the average for the ten previous years. The deaths in Berry Wood Asylum are less than they have been since 1897.

Table II. gives the statistics for the whole district and also for the different sub-districts during the last ten years. By these means a comparison may be drawn between the different places. This only shows a rather marked decline in the births in the Weston Favell district, which is what one would expect, as this district is now a very small one, since Abington, which once belonged to it, has been taken into the Northampton Urban population; but, on the other hand, the deaths in this district are quite up to the average of the ten years, though during part of the time Abington still belonged to this Authority.

Table III. shows the cases of infectious disease notified during the year. There was a total of 103 cases, in comparison with 21 in 1903, 30 in 1902, 21 in 1901, and 12 in 1900. This is a very large increase, and is entirely accounted for by the large number of scarlet fever cases that occurred during the year, no less than 83, so that if these are excluded, the number of notified cases does not compare very unfavourably with previous years. The outbreak of scarlet fever was almost entirely limited to the villages of Dallington, Harpole, and Bugbrooke, and in every case it was possible to trace the primary contagion to contact with persons in the town of Northampton. In this town scarlet fever has been very general throughout the year; there have been so many cases that it has been impossible to isolate them in the hospital, and the disease has spread generally. Our villages are many of them so close to the town, and there is such free intercourse between them and the town, that I am surprised that only three villages have suffered, and that the others have escaped so entirely. I am still of opinion that we should be able to more thoroughly limit these diseases if we had an isolation hospital to which we could remove the first cases. In the Hardingstone district an epidemic has, I feel sure, been several times nipped in the bud by this early treatment, but in this district we can do little but advise. We have taken all the means we can, by distributing handbills with advice to people as to what means to take to limit the spread of the disease, and by freely disinfecting and distributing disinfectants; but I fear such advice is not often followed or the disease would not have spread so rapidly as it has done in the villages of Harpole and Bugbrooke.

The epidemic at Dallington was, fortunately, strictly limited. One child living in a court at the entrance to the village caught the disease from attending school in the town, and it spread to eleven other cases in the same court. By keeping the schools closed, and by strictly ordering the children in the court not to mix with the other village children, the disease quickly died out, so that I think our advice in this case must have been followed. Shortly after, another case occurred again in a child attending a Northampton school, but the Hon. C. R. Spencer most kindly offered to defray all expenses if this case could be isolated, so I took the child at once into the Hardingstone Isolation Hospital, and no other case caught the infection—even in the same cottage. This again emphasizes the point I have already made as to the value of such hospitals.

That our advice as to the isolation of these cases was not followed in Bugbrooke we have had two striking examples. In two cases during the year children have been discovered running about the village, and even attending school, during the peeling stage. In the first case a prosecution was undertaken by your Council and a fine of £1 was inflicted by the County Magistrates; the second case has only just occurred, and is still under consideration as to whether any prosecution shall be enforced. It is almost impossible to limit an outbreak of this disease under these conditions.

Excluding two cases of enteric fever at Berry Wood Asylum, seven cases were notified. Three of these cases occurred at separate times in Old Duston, and the other four broke out simultaneously at Bugbrooke. The first case at Bugbrooke had been working at Broughton, near Kettering, and probably contracted the disease there, as there were cases in that village. The other three cases resided in the same yard as the first man, and the water in this yard on analysis was found to be very impure.

Of the Duston cases, the first, which was unfortunately quickly fatal, occurred in a young man who had just come to live in a small house at the lower end of the village, and who was employed at Berry Wood Asylum. On analysis, the water supply of this house was found very impure, and the well was ordered to be closed. The second case fell ill a very short time after her return from a holiday at Llandudno, and there can be little doubt that the disease was contracted there, as the water supply was found to be good and there were no other cases in the surrounding cottages. The third case in Duston was pretty clearly traced to drinking contaminated rain water, which was collected in an underground tank into which there had been leakage from a defective drain pipe. There was not the least occasion for such water to be used for drinking, as there was a good pump supply within easy reach.

Of the cases of diphtheria notified, one occurred at Kislingbury, but was very doubtful, and the medical man in attendance afterwards stated that he did not think it was diphtheria. Another case was notified at Bugbrooke, where the yard and pigsties were in a very filthy condition, and had probably contaminated the water supply. The third case of diphtheria and the case of membranous croup (fatal) occurred at New Duston, in two children who were cousins living in different houses there. The first case was traced to drinking impure water into which a drain leaked, but by cleaning out the well, bricking and cementing it thoroughly, a remedy seems to have been found. The second child was an infant at the breast, and had visited the other one, so we can only suppose that it caught the disease directly from it.

The case of puerperal fever arose at Bugbrooke, and was attended in her confinement by the doctor there. No other case has been notified, and no case of puerperal fever attended by a midwife has at present been notified in this district.

The schools at Bugbrooke and Dallington have been closed during the year on account of scarlet fever, and the schools at Harpole have been twice closed for the same cause.

Concerning Table IV., giving the causes of deaths, there is little that calls for comment. There was only one death from diarrhœa proper during the year in a young child. There were seven deaths from cancer, six from tubercular diseases, twelve from different pulmonary diseases, five from heart disease, two from accident, and two from suicide.—None much above the average.

The sewage scheme at Duston seems to be working fairly well, though at times the smell from the irrigation plot is said to be offensive. I have advised that the land should be somewhat levelled, so that the effluent can flow more freely over it, and when this is done much of the nuisance will, I believe, be avoided. I still think that some more efficient ventilating shafts will have to be provided for this village before the nuisance arising from the smells at the different drains can be overcome.

The effluent from the Bugbrooke septic tank is now good, and the pollution of the river that was caused by the drainage from this village has been remedied to the satisfaction of the County Authorities. Complaints from the same Authorities have been received concerning the drainage of Harpole, and will probably have to be met in the same way, as it seems much more inexpensive than any other plan yet devised.

The water supply at Duston has been a cause of much anxiety to the Council during the year. When the fatal case of enteric fever already spoken of happened, the water supply of that house was analysed, and also the water supply of most of the cottages at this end of the village, the wells were all found to be highly contaminated, and they were all ordered to be closed. As, till the last two or three years, when the village drainage scheme was taken in hand, all the sewage of the village was discharged into a stone drain running down the main road of the village, I fear that the ground for some distance round the drain has become thoroughly contaminated with sewage, which gets washed into the wells after every rainfall. The Council have held many meetings during the year, and have also conferred with the Parish Council, and have rightly considered that a pure supply of water must be procured. They first endeavoured to come to terms with the Northampton Town Council to supply this village with water, but on account of the difference in levels this scheme has fallen through, and the town have now definitely refused to undertake it. A scheme has been drawn up by Mr. Beeby Thompson and is now under consideration, but at present has not advanced beyond a very early stage.

The water supply at Kislingbury and Heyford still proves very satisfactory, and is a great boon to those villages.

There has been no occasion to use the hospital tent for small pox that was obtained for that purpose, as no cases of that disease have been notified this year. On several occasions, however, we have been able to make use of the arrangement with the Northampton Town Council, for the proper disinfection of bedding and other articles, after their infection from the different infectious diseases.

One bad case of over-crowding at Duston has been dealt with, and the people have now removed into the town.

The dairies and cowsheds have been periodically visited, and twice a year the Sanitary Inspector makes a detailed report on them to your Council. On the whole, there has been a most distinct improvement in these buildings since the passing of this Act, and in one of the worst cases which has given the Council much concern, the old buildings have been entirely demolished and new ones erected.

As regards the Factory Act there is little that calls for remark. We have only one small boot factory at Kislingbury, and there are a few workshops in the village of Harpole; they are visited periodically and are all in a favourable condition. The bakehouses are clean, and attention is paid that they are kept regularly whitewashed; there are no underground bakehouses.

I am, Gentlemen,

Yours faithfully,

G. H. PERCIVAL, M.B.,

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH.

